

House Committees on State Affairs and Energy Resources
TCDD Comments on Statewide Electrical Blackouts
February 25, 2021

Committee Members,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the recent statewide electrical blackouts. My name is Scott Daigle, and I am the Public Policy Director for the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities (TCDD). Established by state and federal law, TCDD is governed by 27 Governor-appointed board members, 60 percent of whom are individuals with developmental disabilities (DD) or family members of individuals with disabilities. The Council's purpose in law is to encourage policy change so that people with disabilities have opportunities to be fully included in their communities and exercise control over their own lives.

As you consider the contributing factors and response to the power outages and resulting water issues, TCDD urges you to keep in mind the additional challenges that were faced by Texans with disabilities throughout this crisis. In particular, I would point you to the experience of individuals whose very lives depend on the operation of durable medical equipment, and the breakdown of safety measures designed to protect them in just these types of circumstances.

The Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) has a program in place for individuals who rely on electric devices to sustain life whereby they may register with the state to receive notifications and possible protections from interruptions or disconnections of electrical service. Similarly, the Texas Division of Emergency Management oversees the State of Texas Emergency Assistance Registry (STEAR), a free registry that provides local emergency planners and first responders with additional information about the needs in their community, including those with critical care needs. However, neither registry seemed to provide any additional security to individuals and families when they needed it the most. Whether it is hurricanes or snowstorms, it remains evident that Texas needs better emergency preparedness and response for people with disabilities. State leaders should ensure that our systems learn how to best support those most vulnerable, and it makes sense to start with utilizing the programs already in place.

Legislators will be dedicating time this session to investigate the systems that worked last week and those that failed, and to determine where gaps exist. TCDD urges policymakers and all who work in service of the public to consider the disproportionate impact of emergencies such as the Winter Storm Uri on Texans with disabilities and to take action to develop more inclusive and equitable emergency response policies and protocols. Whether it is COVID-19 vaccine distribution, or prioritized aid for people with disabilities who depend on electricity to power their health equipment, or mobility services that would transport Texans with disabilities to warming centers, leaders must prioritize the health and safety of individuals most in need.

Please do not hesitate to contact TCDD if we can be of assistance to your efforts.

Thank you.

Scott Daigle, Public Policy Director
Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities